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Contents

Issue Number
1,787

Volume Number
116 - 2

Credits

Industrial Worker is the official publication of the Industrial Workers of the World
PO Box 180195
Chicago, IL 60618

iw@iww.org
www.iww.org

ISSN: 0019-8870
Periodicals Postage paid Chicago, IL

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Pgs. 2-11, 22-23: Tara Zanzig
Pgs. 12-21, and Solidaridad insert: Alec Shurtz
Pgs. 24-27: Tara Zanzig and Alec Shurtz
Pgs. 28,29: O. Boy

Unless otherwise indicated, articles do not reflect the official position of the IWW.

Published Quarterly
Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall

Press Date: May 29th, 2019

Subscription Price
$ 16 US IWW Members
$20 US
$28 International
$60 US Bundle (5)
$80 International Bundle (5)

"The Voice of Revolutionary Industrial Unionism"

Price: $6 ($4 for members) | $8 International

The modern feminist movement has played a huge role in beginning the radicalization of former “Tumblr girls” like myself. Among younger millennials and Generation Z, feminist Instagram pages and debates about women’s rights are where we got our start reading theory and practicing advocacy. However, I’ve noticed a disturbing trend. As I progressed from Everyday Feminism to Angela Davis, most of my fellow feminists did not move with me. Meanwhile, our internet adversaries have steadily traded their MRA fedoras for red pills and tiki torches. So, I set out to find the source of this pussy-hatted radicalization gap and to figure out what we can do to close it.

WAKE UP!

by Raegan Davis



In her article “The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism,” Catherine Rottenberg posits that this coopting of our modern feminist discourse is a tool of capitalism which “hollows out the potential of mainstream liberal feminism to underscore the constitutive contradictions of liberal democracy, and in this way further entrenches neoliberal rationality and an imperialist logic.” Instead of challenging our current economic structure, neoliberal feminism individualizes structural problems, focusing on meeting minimalist goals within the existing capitalist system rather than encouraging collaborative thinking or collectivist strategy. The ideal world of the neoliberal feminist is merely one where she has access to full participation in the means of her own oppression.

Take the age-old question of the wage gap. Francine Blau and Lawrence Khan find that 41.1% of the gender



wage gap is "unexplainable." That means the causes, as posited by the Center for American Progress, could be anything from overt sexism to female unwillingness to ask for wage increases. The Center then goes on to suggest that Congress pass a new law and create a commission to address the gender pay gap. Missing from this solution? The workers getting paid this wage in the first place.

Neoliberal feminism suggests we entrust the state, a guardian of capital, with our liberation from the effects of that capital's oppression. The Equal Pay Act is evidence that our government is not capable of meeting even meager goals with policy. Collective action, however, serves as a safeguard against both sexism and unwillingness to ask for wage increases. As a woman, I was raised to be accommodating, to have more difficulty than my male counterparts when asking for anything. I benefit immensely from a cadre of other folks of all genders standing beside me to bargain that I be treated fairly, granted paid maternity leave, and given a living wage so long as I must work for a wage. In fact, unions facilitate discussions that let female workers know they aren't being paid equally in the first place!

The same Blau and Khan study finds that 4% of the wage gap can be attributed simply to men joining unions more frequently than women overall – we benefit from them yet, instead of joining unions, we go on women's leadership retreats staged/led by firms that specialize in mindfulness meditation or corporate synergy. We buy books written by women who have never been in our shoes about how to solve problems on our own that have existed for hundreds of years. We ignore our fellow workers and we reject them on identarian terms instead of recognizing that collectively we could all benefit from the same victories.

This is especially true when one takes into account how limited neoliberalism's structural analysis is. Women suffer from gendered issues, but these form just one piece of a larger puzzle. Lines drawn along identity serve to divide activists and narrow our focus; they also encourage us to solve problems limited by those identity lines instead of thinking structurally. As long as we restrict what we define as "women's issues" to just those that appear to be caused by our womanhood, we lose the chance for solidarity with other workers. It makes us think we can fix the wage gap with legislation crafted by the same government that instituted COINTELPRO and silences woman's movements once we appear to have achieved our goal.

The neoliberal take on feminism also kills momentum, resulting in white upper-middle-class women dominating the feminist conversation because they are the most likely to achieve any stated goal. We find and idealize leaders who seem to have "overcome" barriers

caused by sexism because the sexism they faced was mono-faceted and we end the conversation there. Neoliberal feminism allows the state to put a bandage over an entire network of problems, pacifying the movement and its appeased white leaders without changing anything substantial – especially not the wages.

Gender discrimination has existed parallel to surplus value because the "market" demanded women breed the future workforce in the wake of the agricultural revolution. Capitalism evolved steeped in sexism and is propped up by the "second shift" women must take to not only work within the system, but to then go home and bear the brunt of domestic labor. The two systems go hand-in-hand and so must be fought together. Unfortunately, mainstream feminism, a potentially powerful force for encouraging activism in half of the global population, serves only to stand in the way of true progress.

We cannot rely on the #Resistance to fight for the working class as it serves the same cause it claims to combat. Instead, we must do our part to cultivate visible spaces within our own groups that model the society we aim for: a place without hierarchies of gender, race, or class. If we can manage to make our movement a more welcoming place for female activism than the hostile world of capitalist and carceral feminism around us, we can channel the growing youth momentum towards a worthier cause.

We have to be careful though, not to criticize neoliberal feminism in a way that can be construed as criticizing women's liberation as a whole. It must be clear to mainstream feminists that our problem is not with them as women or their movement as a woman's movement but instead that we reject it because it bastardizes feminism. It uses women as a stick with which to beat their fellow women and actively looks to silence them while helping them as minimally as possible. We want equality not just for women who look like us or act like us but for every woman everywhere in every job forever. This is a promise neoliberal feminism cannot offer.

The most effective tactic, I have found, is to meet these activists where they are. Many of them have been indoctrinated by civility politics from birth under the guise of "being accommodating." They have been taught throughout their lives that the system is good and kind save for a couple of hiccups about gender that could be easily remedied if our Congress just wrote the legislation a certain way, if they protested peacefully to gain sympathy, and if women proved they can contribute just as much to their boss's pocketbook as their male counterparts.

The structures at large which reinforce these divisions are not visible to budding feminists yet (or else they're a part of that corporatized feminist class which cannot be saved). That's why when I approach them I always open with the wage gap: it's a case study in how the missing ingredient to modern feminism is class consciousness. And until that ingredient is added feminism will never truly be for women; it will only be for some women.

What does a union mean to you? This is the question that we are posing to friends, workmates and fellow Wobblies as part of this ongoing series focussing on the experience of work that is located outside of traditional spaces, is organised informally or atypically, is poorly known or misunderstood.



WHAT DOES A UNION MEAN TO YOU?

Originally printed in *New Syndicalist*

Traditionally, trade unions have an association with heavy industries, transport, the public sector and professions – mostly stable work with a degree of social recognition. The IWW has always run against this thinking, maintaining that not just these but all workers in every workplace should be united under "One Big Union". This has been shown throughout its history by organising sectors of the working class who have been marginalised, ignored or excluded from other unions – migrant and itinerant labour, women, children, people of colour, queer and trans workers amongst others.

It is in this spirit that this irregular series focuses on the experience of work that is located outside of traditional spaces, is organised informally or atypically, is poorly known or misunderstood. In staging these inquiries we hope to understand what the One Big Union idea means within contemporary capitalism, what social, political and economic functions unions must fulfil and how organisers can further support and amplify existing acts of solidarity within these sectors.

In this article we talk to Gemma about their experiences working in care.

How would you describe your work?

I'm working in care work for a non-profit care company that supports its service users with learning disabilities – mostly in independent living. I form part of the night-shift team for a group of about 10 service

users. My role involves a lot of talking and emotional support for young people who are experiencing fairly complex issues in their lives. I've been in the role for about 1 and a half years. My job role is Personal Assistant, however because this is 21st century those words mean little these days. I'm a care worker on barely above minimum wage pay in a city that's rapidly approaching the cost of living somewhere like London.

What do you like about your job?

Care work is something that I find comes naturally to me and I find interacting meaningfully with people to be the most fulfilling part of life. I enjoy seeing people grow and develop over time, and I feel deeply honoured when I play a part in that. If I was to describe or explain why I enjoy care work or social work roles it'd probably come down to the fact that I'm more invested in my work compared to working in a shop or call centre. I'm passionate about social justice and feel that I can somehow help with that in a paid care work role. Getting to know other care workers is a great experience as well since they come from a wide range of backgrounds and always have great stories to tell. Seeing how even under times of stress and desperation, workers are still able to have empathy and compassion for the people they're working with is inspiring. Because I work night-shifts only I get a lot of downtime – even with the occasional emergency two or three times a week! This allows me a lot of time to pursue union related activity. I enjoy how much my coworkers in my team are happy to swap shifts to sort out the rota issues, such as the odd patterns they have us on as night-shift workers.

What do you dislike about your job?

Where to begin? Every care worker will precede any honest appraisal of the job with "I do this job for the people I support… but", and everything after that will be stories of incompetent managers, stressed out supervisors and under-resourced services. Companies taking on lucrative contracts without a single thought given for the needs of staff. They'll be describing a story of how members in services got ill through negligence of a service user's right to choose or NHS issues. They'll talk about the times they were put into dangerous and complex services with only 3 shifts beneath their belts. They'll describe in detail the horrors they witness as service user's 'friends', family and trusted people in their lives forget, abuse or harm the service user and how they as their care workers feel unable to change the direction things are going in.

In my current job it's become a running gag that every rota there'll be some catastrophically messed up bit, someone being asked to work 8 days in a row or put on 15 hour shifts without being asked. There'll be some small issue that was overlooked that un-does someone's holiday plans they'd booked and been approved for. Payroll will constantly mess up your paycheck, especially if you're taking holidays or off sick. There's no way to see the hours that you've worked unless you keep a meticulous record at home (something I do recommend anyone who has to log hours does) Managers will regularly require members of staff to take pay cuts, knowing full well it's illegal to reduce hours without a new contract. Don't get me start-

ed on even trying to book holidays in the first place – all the services in my area are understaffed, some by as much as half as many people needed! The hiring of agency workers (which costs the company double, if not triple, the wages they pay someone employed directly by the company) or service managers working the same job role as the Personal Assistants and the PAs being given managerial roles like rotas and reporting. Recent statistics show that something like 25-30% of staff in any given care company leave within the first year or two (called churn if anyone's interested follow this link).

Issues with incorrect equipment given on the job seems like an easy issue to challenge. You're not given the right tools for the work you do, so you don't do the work, right? Well in care work that's a bit more difficult. A lot of workers come into this job expecting the company to be on their side regarding everything. People are recruited on the basis of appearing professional and well organised and so it's understandable that they come into the job with high expectations. The reality is quite different. Equipment that's missing isn't noticed until it's needed. Body fluid spill kits are things we had to request multiple times and nothing materialised until after an incident where one of our service users left stool all over the bathroom (we had to use another service users materials, waking them up by fetching them). There was another incident involving a client throwing a TV through a window. Staff resigned themselves to picking up large shards of glass in a room with still wet blood on the walls. We weren't provided heavy duty gloves, or a kit to clean the room with and workers cut themselves on the glass. This also made this room uninhabitable for a week while the company delayed sending professional cleaners to remove all the shards of glass from the carpet in the bedroom. Both these incidents could have easily led to more injuries. As care workers we are often here because we care about the people we're looking after, and noone wants to stand by and watch someone be hurt or be surrounded by hazards and not do anything about it. In this industry we are very rarely given time to read the policies in place for hazard controls, and very often the companies will flaunt health and safety best practice. This creates a disaster of awareness around hazards and what to do when they occur. Only experienced staff members have much chance dealing with these issues safely, or people who have a knack for understanding their job role and seeing that it's too far beyond what's acceptable to do.

In the night shift we're lucky to have two members of staff on. In the above two incidents there was only one member of staff on, which as you can imagine, introduces further risks to service users inadvertently injuring themselves further while not being looked after properly.

I think enforcing health and safety policies and the law are probably the most effective solution to this if you're by yourself in these issues. Companies and managers are extremely risk averse, and will take action very quickly when you start banding about words like 'HR' and 'injuries at work'. However, this generally requires a great deal of reading and learning of risk assessments, hazard controls and Health and Safety legislation. If there are members in your trade union branches who are in-

terested or knowledgeable around these particular issues then it'd be good to seek their advice and support.

If these issues are systemic and impacting a lot of workers they may also form a good basis for campaigns against the employer. Talk with your colleagues to find out if they're experiencing issues around health and safety and inappropriate PPE (protective personal equipment) being supplied. I've found it's a very good reminder to workers about how much a company actually cares about them. If their demands of being protected at work to is being ignored then you can bet the company doesn't care about other conditions too

Is there anything that you do on the job that makes it easier/safer/more enjoyable?

A lot of my coworkers self-organise their own team without a great deal of oversight from management. The structures in place such as the company email address we're assigned are very much a one way street for anything important. Most teams have their own WhatsApp group, making it easier to coordinate work activity. I've been pushing for any new team that doesn't have these in place to get them sorted. When it comes to demanding our managers take on our concerns seriously we as a nightstaff team will regularly send the same email to the manager at the same time. Our manager very often pretend not to notice some of our smaller complaints, however they seem to think most of our complains are small, so when we've had enough we draft a letter and ctrl-c it to get others to highlight the issue. So far things get sorted out quickly when that happens.

I'm currently a dual-carder with a large care work union, I was very quickly accepted into the ranks of being a union rep after a 30 minute phone call with one of the permanent union officers who is supporting reps in the private care work sector. I've found that the union is extremely keen on getting experienced or keen shop stewards on the ground in this company, so much so that after just being a rank and file member of the union they put me on shop-steward training. I'm hoping to push coworkers in the direction of forming a union branch and keeping it radical, though that is yet to be seen how crushing the unions bureaucratic functions are (I presume very!).

What does solidarity in your work mean to you?

In our workplace your time in service lasts months, not the usual years you often find. Things are bad right now and so much of that is due to the extreme staff turnover rate currently in the service. Our night staff team is a bit of an outlier, we don't take the literal punches or knocks on the head that some of the day staff teams have to put up with. You're considered a senior member of staff with 10 months experience here. The solidarity I see and practice is that of being someone that can be there to answer the questions about the awkward payroll system, or about what's the best way to cook a service user's food. It's also in the empathy we give each other as care workers. I will sit and listen to when my coworkers talk of times they've felt physically sick from worry or when they've walked into a room that has a smell that sticks to you for weeks. It's an awful and isolating job, that if you can't offload

those bad feelings at the end of the workday, you will be taking them home with you. The cost of care work to society is far more than just the wage that's being paid to us, it's also in our bodies and minds too. I've put on weight in this role, I know many of my colleagues have become extremely sick from the stresses of being worked too hard, from effectively 24 hours shifts (8 at night, 8 for sleeping night shift and then another 8 during the next day) The labour – physical, caring and emotional, is so utterly draining sometimes especially when something goes wrong in a service. It's in these moments you see colleagues taking up the slack because people can't go on and need a break. It's in the way we all gather round a decision that management's forced upon us and collectively say no without a hesitation. It's the swapping of shifts to allow coworkers to see their husbands in other countries to prevent the home office from charging them several thousand pounds more for a new visa.

What does a union mean to you?

The presence of a union doesn't mean much to a lot of my coworkers here, they're seen as good ideas in theory but not many people have experience of organising with them or considering them as avenues to enact change for better conditions and pay. There's the usual feelings of skittishness and concern about seen as a trouble maker. Considering how isolated people are from each other in this workplace it's not surprising. I believe a union is only as strong as the links between its members, and in the care work industry people are often kept apart from other care workers that those links barely get established. Even in your own team you maybe only see each other for 30 minutes a day during hand over and then it's on to lone working for a full shift of 6-7 hours.

Reinforcing these links are essential, most people in my area have been fucked over one way or another by the company in some fundamental way and it doesn't take much to get people to start bad mouthing the company. It's amazing when you see them getting together to talk about these experiences, as the old saying goes "the personal is the political", and people start catching on really fast that these issues aren't with them but across the board. Building that recognition often takes the form of bringing those people together artificially at first, say in a cafe to meet to discuss workplace issues over a cup of tea, but also remember that they will have been talking to people they trust in their teams, usually a more experienced member of staff that seems cool and won't rat them out to management. I've recently started trying to get coworkers to meet up with me outside of work and I think people respond well to having these thoughts and experiences listened to. I'm hoping to make these regular occurrences, and my next one should have a few more people at it. This is really early in the stages of building some kind of union organisation in my workplace, and I'm in a privileged position to do it, I can think about this while on the job and have time to plan and prepare. Many others don't. ●

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The Edge of Anarchy

A new book tells the story of the Pullman Strike, an epic late 19th century clash between labor and capital that shook the nation and led Eugene Debs to Socialism.

By Eric Dirnbach

I first learned about Eugene Debs when I read Nick Salvatore's fantastic biography "Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist" about 20 years ago. I was so impressed I scrawled his dramatic sedition case quote on my graduate school bedroom wall in thick black marker; "While there is a lower class, I am in it, and while there is a criminal element, I am of it, and while there is a soul in prison, I am not free."

So I was very interested when Jack Kelly's "The Edge of Anarchy: The Railroad Barons, the Gilded Age, and the Greatest Labor Uprising in America" appeared, since this covers in detail Debs's famous 1894 Pullman strike, certainly a pivotal moment in US labor history. The book is a clash between two giants of the day, with Debs representing labor and George Pullman representing capital in a Gilded Age railroad strike.

Kelly tells a lively and readable story of the strike, with lots of detail that helps us to better understand the challenges of labor organizing in the 1890s. He is sympathetic to labor, but doesn't create a caricature of Pullman or his capitalist allies as merely greedy or evil. They were representatives of an upper class at the time who held extremely conservative views on "free enterprise," property rights and the natural subordinate place of workers in the capitalist system.

This strike also centers the conflict between competing versions of unionism and shows the radicalization of Debs, who would go on to become the most famous American socialist in history. And though this strike was lost, the conflict followed a familiar historical pattern – that while workers are dealt with harshly by employers and the government, their organizing leads to reforms that slowly address some of their terrible working conditions.

The Gilded Age Economy

Workers in the decades after the Civil War saw tumultuous changes in the economy, with the dramatic development of industrial capitalism that by the 1890s had moved a majority of the working class into the status of employees, rather than working for themselves in agricultural or artisanal production. As the book summarizes, "In the workplace, independence – the defining feature of American society – had given way to the autocracy of bosses."

It was the dramatic growth of the railroads that helped bring about this transformation, stimulating an explosion of steel, coal, machine tool production, and other industries. Moreover, this raw, under-regulated, robber-baron capitalism generated staggering inequality, with three-quarters of the national wealth held by only 200,000 people — less than one percent of the population.

In these circumstances, the book nicely presents the back stories of Debs and Pullman which set the stage for the conflict. Debs grew up in Indiana and went to work on the railroad at age 14, becoming a fireman several years later – shoveling coal, monitoring the engine, and watching the tracks. He soon joined the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and became the editor of the union's magazine.

What was surprising to me is the reminder that the young Debs held fairly conservative union views. He had absorbed the ideology of the railroad craft unions at the time, which saw their organizations as providers of skilled labor for a decent wage.

"One of our fundamental doctrines," Debs wrote in Firemen's Magazine, "is that labor and capital are brothers." Money could do nothing without labor, which he called "muscle capital." Owners and workers could only prosper in a "harmonious alliance." He insisted that the role of the brotherhoods was to provide the corporations with "a class of honest and intelligent laborers, men upon whom they can depend."

But Debs was radicalized over time as the railroads consolidated into "management bureaucracies" that degraded working conditions. He tried unsuccessfully to build a stronger alliance among the rail brotherhoods who often betrayed each other. It's interesting to see his evolution toward the left, toward a new model of union — one organized on an industrial basis, where any worker on the railroad could join, even those considered "unskilled" by the craft unions.

In 1893, Debs organized the founding meeting of the American Railway Union, open to all 750,000 railroad workers. Even with this new kind of union, Debs was wary of strikes. He believed that if the union was strong enough, management would settle grievances without the need for striking.

"'Our cause is just,' Debs had told his followers. Their purpose was not to war with the railroads but to bring about a new era for the workingman. 'Strikes as labor weapons are obsolete,' he said. 'We have advanced to a higher scale.'"

George Pullman grew up in New York, and worked at the family construction business. After making money in the Colorado gold rush, he settled in Chicago and took over a sleeping car business. His company upgraded the sleeper quality and redesigned the car for more comfort. The growth of the railroads, including five transcontinental lines, meant more long trips and demand for sleeper cars.

Pullman slowly developed a near monopoly. Leasing the cars and maintaining control over them, he built one of largest vertically integrated factories in the world. His new company town

of Pullman, south of Chicago, was a meticulously planned city to "improve" the workers who lived there. Like many of his class, he wanted to help on his terms and within his own understanding of working class conditions.

Some aspects of the town were positive, such as the relatively high quality houses and schools. But the book makes clear, the workers were living in a dictatorship, with no local government and Pullman executives controlling the town. Moreover, houses in the town were owned by Pullman and rented out to workers to make money. Personally, Pullman was known for being cold, reserved and dictatorial, a great contrast to the friendly, gregarious and humble Debs.

Depression and Trouble at the Company Town

A major depression started in 1893, which caused rising unemployment, and discontent developed at Pullman. In one of the most infamous labor-management decisions in US history, Pullman cut wages drastically, but not rents. Workers were plunged into poverty and brought their complaints to management.

In hindsight, Pullman blundered by making no improvements which may have prevented the strike. Workers joined the ARU and thousands walked out. The union asked for negotiations but the company replied that there was "nothing to arbitrate," which became its famous phrase.

Soon afterwards, the ARU held its convention in Chicago. This is one of those historic labor meetings I would have loved to attend, and Kelly does a good job of describing the debates in this key decision point of the strike. Pullman's workers pleaded for help, arguing that wage cuts at Pullman would cause competitors to reduce wages, leading to more rounds of the "dance of skeletons bathed in human tears." Debs was cautious and wasn't sure the ARU was ready for this confrontation. He proposed another arbitration offer and more committee discussions. However, the convention voted to support the workers with a Pullman car boycott. All ARU members were instructed to not handle Pullman cars in any way – no inspections, no attaching them to trains, and no running of trains that included them.

Women workers at Pullman were ARU members, but there was a crucial convention debate about admitting black workers. Many members wanted a whites-only policy, which was the rail brotherhood custom. Pullman had long hired black porters – he had the Republican sense of wanting to help former slaves but only so much. They had very low pay, servile jobs, and were often referred to by customers as "George."

Debs argued for open membership to strengthen the union in this fight. The convention voted narrowly 112-110 to bar black members. It's painful to look at such a mistaken historic vote and if a few delegates had switched sides this could have altered the course of US history. Debs himself looked back on that vote and said, "the inclusion of the porters might have resulted in a different story of the strike, for it would certainly have had a different result."

The Strike and Boycott

ARU members started their boycott and if any were fired, other members walked off the job in support. Within days the strike became a larger industry-wide labor dispute. Years earlier the railroad corporations had formed the General Managers' Association to coordinate union-busting activities and to fix both wages and prices. The GMA got involved in fighting the ARU strike, seeing it as an existential threat to the industry.

The strike spread throughout the country, idling hundreds of thousands of workers. Passenger transportation was disrupted and food and coal shipments were delayed, causing prices to rise. The New York Times declared that the strike had "assumed the proportions of the greatest battle between labor and capital that has ever been inaugurated in the United States." Public sympathy was with the strikers and against the "leviathan, with tentacles of steel," as an author of the time described the railroad corporations.

The government moved quickly to crush the strike. US Attorney General Richard Olney spent his career as a lawyer in the railroad industry and sided with the employers. He recruited thousands of "marshalls," paid by the railroads, as a private strike-breaking force. He also issued a strike injunction based on the Anti-Trust Act and restraint of interstate commerce which was, of course, never applied to the GMA. The injunction's broad scope barred the union from communicating with members about the strike and even barred members from talking to scabs to convince them not to work.

State militia and over 16,000 federal troops were mobilized to get the trains running again. Police fired on strikers, injuring and killing dozens. Over the next week, they managed to get much of the rail system running again. Publicly mediated arbitration efforts came and went but the companies still refused to negotiate.

The New York Times declared that the strike had "assumed the proportions of the greatest battle between labor and capital that has ever been inaugurated in the United States."

Solidarity Forever?

Chicago unions conducted a general strike but participation was low and it was ultimately unsuccessful. Debs saw an expansion of the strike as the only way forward and he appealed to American Federation of Labor President Samuel Gompers for help. This is a second key decision point of the strike — whether or not the labor movement would provide solidarity. Gompers was considered a realist, as the book points out:

> "Where Debs saw his American Railway Union confronting and defeating the growing power of the monopolies, Gompers shaped the American Federation of Labor to defend limited gains. Where Debs saw a new, cooperative society, Gompers saw a larger paycheck for his members."

Gompers was not supportive of industrial unionism since he believed that workers' power and leverage resided only in their skills. Debs believed anything was possible if more workers would join the struggle. Gompers didn't have faith in most unskilled workers, so the AFL rejected a wider general strike.

President Cleveland announced he would appoint a commission to investigate the strike after it was over. Debs took this as a plan to arbitrate and he offered the industry a return to work. The GMA refused and the strike sputtered out as workers tried to get their jobs back. The ARU voted to officially call off the boycott several weeks later.

Some workers were rehired but were forced to sign "yellow dog" contracts promising they wouldn't join a union. Railroad companies used a blacklist to keep out former strikers and about ¾ of the workers never got their jobs back.

The Aftermath

While the story of a crushed strike is all too common in US history, the Commission appointed to investigate the strike was not, and it held two weeks of hearings. Debs and Gompers called for better regulation of the railroad companies. But Debs went further, proposing government ownership of the railroads, rather than "railroad ownership of Government." He then too another step to the left, stating "I believe in a cooperative commonwealth as a substitute for the wage system," where workers would get the wealth they produced.

The Commission's 700 page report harshly criticized Pullman and the GMA. It went easy on the union, and called for pro-labor reforms. This led to the passage of progressive federal labor and health and safety legislation several years later.

Debs and union officials were convicted of violating the injunction and Debs was sentenced to six months in jail. An appeal went to the Supreme Court, which affirmed the decision. A criminal conspiracy case against Debs was dismissed as there was evidence that the GMA had disrupted trains to make the ARU look bad.

President Cleveland's Democratic Party lost massively in the 1894 and 1896 elections, as his heavy-handed response to the strike had alienated workers. Debs finished his jail sentence and had read up on socialism while incarcerated. Upon his arrival back in Chicago, he was greeted by 100,000 people.

Debs soured on the mainstream political parties and declared himself a socialist in 1897, "'The stark issue,' he proclaimed, was, 'Socialism vs. Capitalism. I am for Socialism because I am for humanity.'" He famously ran for president five times under his newly formed Socialist Party between 1900 and 1920, getting six percent of the vote in 1912 and almost a million votes in 1920 while in prison for speaking out against World War One. Later he took part in the founding convention of the IWW. In 1905 President Harding commuted his final prison sentence and Debs died of a heart attack in 1926 at 71 years old.

What The Pullman Strike Shows Us Now

The ARU leadership didn't want this strike and only supported the workers because they needed help. Waging a huge strike against the railroad industry amidst government repression was too much for the union. Wider labor solidarity would have helped but that was difficult to get during a depression when workers were desperate for jobs.

Even though the strike was lost the issues raised helped usher in Progressive Era reforms, which were the precursor to the New Deal era. Debs's view of the necessity of industrial unions was adopted by the IWW and later became mainstream with the formation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations in the 1936 and the subsequent organization of auto, steel, and other large industries.

Of course, the battle between labor and capital has never ended, but for a brief time after World War Two, unions might have had the power that Debs always wanted, with enough strength to bargain for increasingly better wages, benefits, and working conditions. But since the 1970s unions have been in decline, and the private sector union density is now 6.4%, about the same as in Debs's day.

Debs would no doubt be encouraged by the endurance and recent growth of the IWW, the rise of the Democratic Socialists of America (with its roots in his Socialist Party), and the millions of people in the US once more interested in socialist ideas. We can again take up the issues he raised so forcefully through his union struggles and presidential campaigns in our fight for the transformation of society •

Eric Dirnbach is a labor movement researcher in New York City and a member of the IWW and DSA.

Media Workers Organize

J. A. Hanrahan talks to the Freelance Journalists Union about what it takes to build a union in the 21st century



Freelance journalists all over the world face the same injustices that all workers face, yet the nature of their work provides some unique challenges to labor organization. Recently a number of journalists in the United States formed the Freelance Journalists Union — in affiliation with the IWW — to try and combat injustices in the industry, including delinquent payments for services rendered and a lack of healthcare provided.

Industrial Worker reached out to the FJU and spoke with Justin Glawe, a freelance journalist working in Dallas, Texas. An industry veteran, Justin has seen firsthand the mistreatment freelance journalists experience. In this interview, he and an anonymous organizer shared these issues, explaining to just how freelance journalists are taken advantage of by publications large and small and the steps the FJU is taking to ensure fair and equal labor rights for freelancers everywhere.

J. A. Hanrahan: Give me a quick rundown of why the FJU was formed and what it's purpose and goal is?

Justin Glawe: Yeah, sure. I mean it's pretty simple really. It was formed because there's not really any sort of entity like this right now for independent media workers and freelance journalists. This sort of thing just does not exist in any fashion at all useful to people who fit into those two categories. Especially at a time where it seems like every month there's more bad news about publications large and small, national and local going through layoffs and firings. Those people are a lot of the times reentering the industry as freelancers.

Both of these reasons — the first one being that there isn't any organized representation for freelancers and then also the fact that, personally, I think we're increasing in numbers and if not increasing in numbers then definitely increasing in our collective power over the industry and how much content we're providing for publications. I think this gives us some bargaining power and makes this whole organizing thing an important job to do.

JH: You guys are still kind of in a beginning phase, right. There haven't been any major disputes yet?

JG: We're at the point right now where we're still just fielding calls from the initial callout we did in late March. We're still finding time to talk to folks who got back to us when we announced ourselves to the world. The result was so great that we're still dealing with that influx.

JH: Is that more of a US-centered thing or are you reaching out to people from all over the world?

JG: Well, it's actually them reaching out to us. It is mainly US but off the top of my head I know there have been folks in the UK that have gotten back to us, and there's an American based in Paris that has gotten back to us. The organizer can probably tell you a little more about that, but there is an international contingent.

Anonymous Organizer: When we started back in September we were really focusing our efforts on US publications since that's who we predominantly write for but the goal is not to focus on freelancers just in the United States but with other Anglophone countries and places where international coverage is related to US media.

From the beginning this was definitely international. When we started the callout in March, we received interest from freelancers who are in no way connected to US media but still interested in organizing and we obviously didn't want to turn these people away since they're facing the same problems we're facing, just in an international or regional context. We've been trying to help them the best we can and trying to start organizing campaigns in their communities. In El Salvador and in Lebanon we've been in touch with folks who are interested in organizing parallel efforts and we're trying to give them the information and resources from the IWW to basically replicate what we've done here in their own national or regional context.

JH: For readers who may not understand the struggles a freelancer faces could you go over a few things that publications and big companies are shafting freelancers on?

JG: The way that I describe it to people oftentimes is that this is the only industry in which an independent contractor, because that's what we are, goes and has to sell a publication on the product we're trying to provide for them, get that approved, and then provide the labor which creates the product without being compensated for it in a normal style. When a plumber says this is what the job is going to cost, they have an hourly rate, and you pay them when they bill you. That's not the way that it works for freelancers. This is just a small part of what we have to deal with, but it's sort of the logistical and financial aspect of it.

I have two stories that I've been working on, one for four months and one for six months. We're talking about hundreds of hours of labor; all sorts of time and resources are spent on these things. I probably won't get paid for them for another four to six months down the road and the pay I will get will be not at all representative of the time I put into it.

We're dealing with late and delinquent

payments and a backwards payment structure. We're dealing with not being properly compensated for our time. A lot of people are dealing with not being compensated at all which hopefully is a rare occurrence.

In addition to that, freelancers are the bottom of the barrel for a lot of publications so we're the last people to get paid, we're the last people to get any sort of consideration for decent working conditions. We feel that this is completely unfair, and it's also not representative to the labor that freelancers are providing and the amount of content that we're providing to these publications. These publications would not exist without freelancers.

Everybody is going towards this independent contractor/gig economy model, whatever you want to call it, and it's no different in publishing, whether it's a national publication or a local one. They're all starting to use this part-time labor. We feel like at this point in time we're at a great place to throw our weight around and say, "Hey, you have to start treating us better, because without us you don't exist."

JH: You mentioned that freelancers are independent contractors; the last time I was on the phone with the FJU I was informed that independent contractors in the US are treated differently under the labor laws than somebody with a full-time job. Could you touch on how being considered an independent contractor can be detrimental in certain ways?

JG: Well, for one thing you have to provide your own healthcare, which is increasingly becoming very problematic because of the efforts to cut Obamacare.

Otherwise it's just like anything else. I used to work at a factory in Peoria, Illinois, where I'm from. It was a Caterpillar factory, the massive global tractor company, and it was all union. Everybody working at the factory, from the cafeteria worker to the guy putting the engine together, was in the union. Over time the unions became less powerful, they got screwed over in negotiations, and more and more guys started getting outsourced. That's how I got my job there, I was getting paid ten bucks an hour to drive a forklift and pick up parts and take them to the line. A job that used to be, ten years before I got it, a twenty-dollar-per-hour union job with benefits.

Publications and writers have been trying to organize themselves; we've seen that movement over the past couple of years. Vice in New York, the LA Times, there was an effort at Buzzfeed to unionize, at least at the national level folks have been trying to do that. What they're trying to do is to protect themselves against the guys like me coming in for ten dollars an hour that took that forklift job down in Peoria. We're trying to do that, too. Full-time staffers have a level of protection and benefits and job security and, frankly, just a regular paycheck that freelancers don't have.

AO: In terms of a more legal perspective, labor law in the United States is notoriously bad across the board, but it's particularly bad for independent contractors because we're not seen by the government as being employees, we're seen as our own independent businesses.

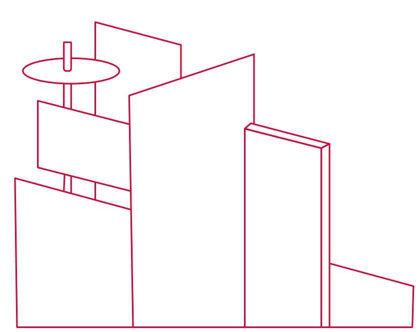
What that means is that a lot of labor laws don't apply to us, there are some significant legal hurdles in that process because we're independent contractors. That's not to say it's not possible; there are significant unions in film and television that are made up of independent contractors. They've been through this process and are quite powerful at this point in American history, especially compared to other unions.

That is something that we aspire to do, it's what we can set our sights on in the long term, but for right now we see the IWW organizing model, which relies on solidarity and collective action, as immediately available to us. We think that this provides a much better model for organizing rather than the traditional route.

JG: If you're an independent contractor then you should be able to go to the bargaining table, like what was mentioned with the film unions, and say, "Look guys, you're treating me as an independent contractor, as a freelancer, you're 1099ing me, I'm not making that much money, you've got people on staff, but the labor I'm doing is essential."

Not just in media, but across the entire economy it is happening more and more where people are just ignoring that law and ignoring the fact that we are providing essential labor for the financial well-being of these publications and these companies, but we're not being treated as if we're essential. We're treated like, "Oh, here's your little fee, sorry it took us six months to get it to you, and we're not going to pay you as much as we pay the staffers, and don't worry about healthcare or anything like that." So I think that that's an important distinction to make, too.

AO: Yeah, the phenomenon that Justin is describing is sometimes called "misclassification" and it's the idea that freelancers are treated more like "permalancers," meaning they're fulfilling the role of a full-time employee but receiving none of the pro-



tections or the benefits. That's something that's also comes up repeatedly and affects a lot of the freelancers that we're trying to address.

We think that in some way our flexibility is our advantage and not our weakness. We can have labor actions that are much more diverse than what traditional unions would be able to pull off.

JH: So a union at say, a department store, can enforce their demands by calling a strike. The very nature of freelance work means that you're spread out and operating primarily in a digital space. What are going to be some of the strategies that you employ to organize labor and enforce your demands?

JG: Well, I think it's less in terms of, "Hey, we're going to strike one day and none of us are going to answer our emails." I don't necessarily think that that is an effective way to do it.

I keep going back to the numbers, the increasing numbers of how many [freelancers] there are. I think of it more in terms of "applying pressure," right? Applying pressure in individual instances and as a collective to publications and saying, "Look, here's what we're asking for, here's what we want you guys to do. We want to be treated in a more fair manner, the way the staffers are treated." Especially for those folks the Organizer described as 'permalancers.' I think that is where we have an ability to achieve better working conditions for people that is separate from the traditional way of everybody calling off work and standing outside on a picket line method of striking.

AO: As a non-traditional labor force, and as one that's so decentralized and atomized, there are challenges to traditional labor organizing that we have to address in unique ways. I think one way that we've already been doing it is asking ourselves how we do outreach. How do we reach out to the folks that are our friends and coworkers, because there's no office, no factory, no store where we all congregate so we have to use our common workspace, which is the internet.

We've been using our tools there to reach each other and to talk to each other through social networking, through social media, using video conferences and calls and stuff like that to build the connections and form the solidarity that is at the heart of every union. We'll almost certainly have to use similar tactics when it comes to fighting for our demands, so whether that's public shaming, or memes, or a hashtag, those are definitely avenues that we'll have to use, because our workplace is the internet. When we have a labor dispute we bring it online.

That being said, there are also traditional labor tactics that might be open to us and might be very effective. A picket at the headquarters of a publication is very effective and quite a powerful thing regardless of whether freelancers are doing [it] or if staffers are doing it. I think it would also take a lot of publications by surprise that we were able to organize something in real life because they really don't see us as a class of worker like they see their staffers; if we can act like a class that would demonstrate some of the power that we have.

Beyond that, I think we could employ a tactic like a strike, just that it would be more of a boycott for us. That's not really a weakness; it can be a strength because if you work in a traditional environment and you go on strike there's really no other way you can make money unless you very quickly find a part-time job. On our side we can have almost an indefinite boycott because what we can do is try to hold the line and tell our members and the general public not to write for a publication.

For our members that feel like they don't have the privilege to withhold their labor for financial reasons we can hook them up with other publishing opportunities or something more traditional like a strike fund to tide them over.

We think that in some way our flexibility is our advantage and not our weakness. We can have labor actions that are much more diverse than what traditional unions would be able to pull off.

JG: The very nature of the fact that we are organizing and we are talking to one another and we have a name; this is organizing action in and of itself. I think it's a powerful thing and it's already netting some progress.

JH: So a little earlier we were talking about other independent contractors who have successfully organized and the first thing that comes to mind for me when I think about that would be the Writers Guild of America and the Screen Actors Guild who do have a lot of sway in what goes in their respective industries. The Writers Guild has a Minimum Basic Agreement, and if production studios don't meet that it's almost impossible to find people to produce content for them. Does the FJU have any plans for doing something like that?

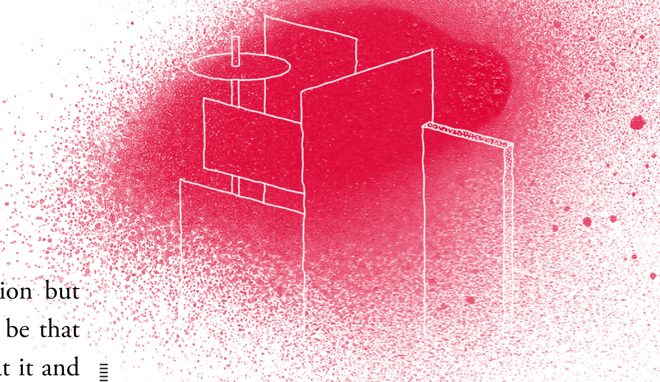
AO: We definitely take a lot of inspiration from them, because I think that they illustrate that independent contractors can organize and I think they're one of the strongest unions in the country right now because they can literally shut down an industry if management doesn't play ball with them.

We definitely want to work up to a point to be that powerful, but I think it's always worth understanding these efforts and their historical context. Both of the unions in television and film really got their go at the beginning of the 20th century when labor in this country was at a much more powerful level than it is right now. They were able to assign a bargaining unit and win elections and were able to challenge the management on a better footing than what we're at right now.

That's not to say that these things aren't important, and they are the challenges we wish to address in the future, but we think that we don't necessarily have that degree of power right now, that solid base of support that would be needed to win something like that. If we were to take this in front of, for example, the National Labor Relations Board right now, we risk not only losing the fight ourselves but we could hamper all sorts of labor organizing for decades to come because we overestimated our strength.

JH: On the topic of political issues in the journalism realm, it's becoming increasingly apparent in America that news sources are taking increasing political stances. Some news sources are clearly on one side of the political spectrum. Do you think this is going to affect which publications are willing to listen to you?

JG: It could but look — there's right-wingers that freelance too. But if you're someone who writes for the Daily Caller or the Washington Free Beacon or something like that and you put months and months into a story and they don't pay you or they pay you less than what they said they'd pay you I can almost guarantee that your political beliefs aren't going to affect the fact that you're not happy you're not being paid for your labor.



So yes, people will have an opinion but I think the struggle isn't going to be that the people on the right will look at it and be like, "Oh another union thing, these people are whining," I think the biggest struggle is the attitude towards the press in general. I think something we'll have to overcome is this hurdle that's been put in place in the last several years that the press is the enemy, that we're un-American, that we're out to get Trump. In my mind that's where the struggle lies.

AO: I think it's worth pointing out that the IWW itself is not politically aligned. We have members across the political spectrum, but as per our constitution we're prohibited from making any alliances with political parties. In that sense we can never become co-opted by the Democrats or Republicans or anything like that. Members are free to do anything they want. Justin put it well, even if you write for a right-wing outlet, if they don't pay you your ideology doesn't make a difference, you need that money. Even right-wingers think their bosses suck. That's why we think unionizing is important, not from an ideological perspective, but purely from the perspective of a working-class person.

JG: I want those people involved, too. I want people who write about different political beliefs and have different political backgrounds. I want those people involved with the union and I want it to be made clear that this is not a partisan thing and yes, a lot of us tend to be more liberal, because a lot of people who work in media tend to be. But look, if you are a writer and a freelance journalist and you are getting worked over by a publication, we support your struggle, we support your cause. We welcome you and you should come in and join us. We can work together; it doesn't matter if you have completely opposite political beliefs, this is about making better working conditions for our labor. It doesn't matter where you're coming from. We want this to be a new thing across the industry, to help out all kinds of folks.

AO: Also I think that sort of lends itself to a more realistic and more valuable form of politics that's not about being Republican or Democrat: it's about workers working together to get what we need. In a lot of ways that cuts through this sort of littoral political divide.

JH: You mentioned that you're still in your early stages, but do you guys have an idea of the first action that you're going to take as a union?

JG: One of the first things we're going to have to do is put up a list of concerns, airing our grievances as it were. We'll do that on our website, I think. After we gauge the response to that, we can figure out what step two is.

It's important to stress here that the reason there's not a hard and fast step one, two, and three is because we are by definition a collective. There's no appointed leader, there's no hierarchal leadership structure. We are making decisions based off of the input of our members. Things take a little bit of time because there's not just one person calling the shots. It's important that people understand we are truly a collective organization and there isn't a top-down leadership structure that other unions and other organizing efforts have had in the

past.

AO: We're focusing on outreach; we're focused on building a democratic structure so people can have their interests addressed in our organizing. This can take a lot of different forms moving forward: a list of grievances, having a Bill of Rights.

When it comes more to applying direct action as you were asking about, we're taking our first steps towards that [by] having a survey which will give our members an opportunity to let us know what problems we're having with specific publications. We want to find out which publications owe them money, which editors have ghosted them; very concrete issues that we can then look at collectively and say, "This is where we've having problems, this is where we need leverage. How can we use this information to determine our next steps?"

From there maybe it's a list of demands, or maybe it's something more specific like, "OK, there's a significant number of us who are owed money from this particular publication, maybe we should go after that first."

Whatever comes of this will be a collective decision-making process, so it's really difficult to say, "This is what we're doing next," because that would entail having a concrete plan that we're forcing upon everyone rather than having an organic plan that bubbles up from the bottom.

JG: For sure, though at one point we will have a Bill of Rights. That is forthcoming and that will be happening. The reason that's going to take a bit of time is because we want to survey a broad cross section of the industry and we want to have a diverse group of people put in their concerns. There's lots of different publications and there's lots of different writers. That's going to end up as a pretty diverse list so we want to have a Bill of Rights to match.

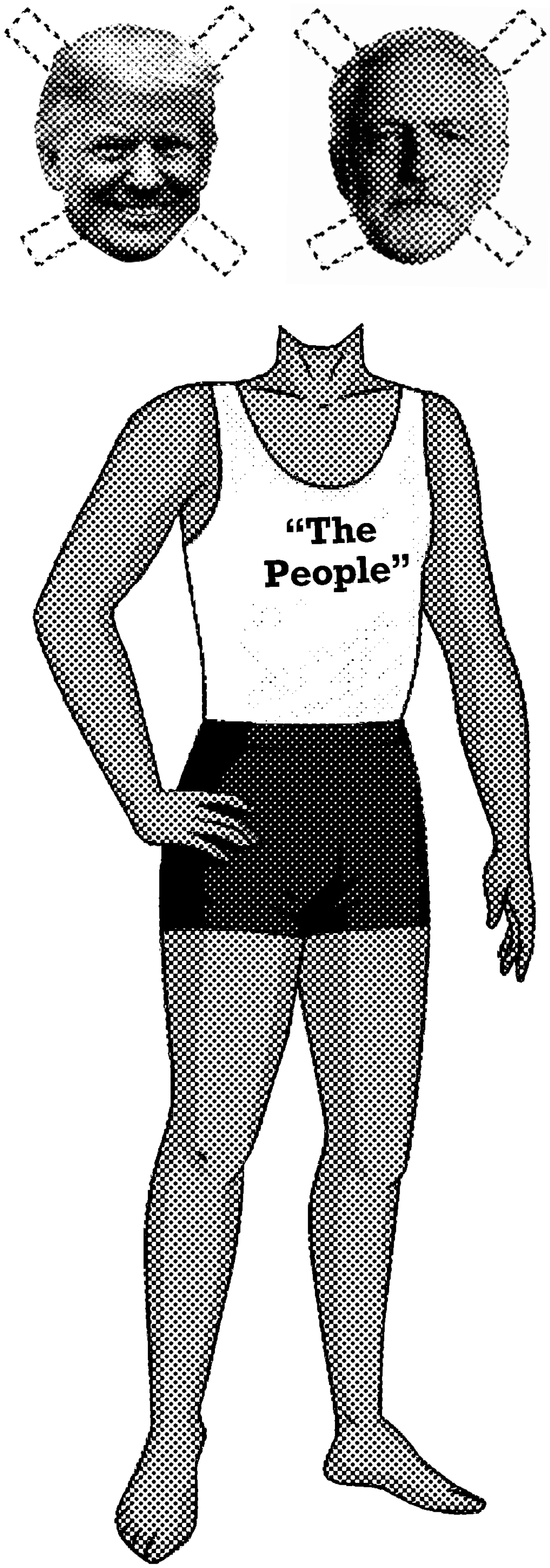
JH: Being a collective of journalists, do you think it'll be pretty easy to get this stuff out to the public as you have multiple contacts in the industry and everyone in the FJU is a writer by nature?

JG: Absolutely. I keep going back to the numbers we actually have. The main two publications I write for I've done so for five years. When I run into people or when people contact me, they assume I'm a staff writer for this publication. People see a byline on a publication and assume that person is a staff writer. There's not a lot of people in the US that are journalists. We're a small number of the population, but a lot of us have some pretty big platforms, and pretty big audiences. That's definitely an advantage for when this Bill of Rights and list of grievances come out. We'll be able to promote them very effectively.

AO: [Freelancers] might actually be the largest group of people contributing to the news. It's unclear because the numbers aren't very forthright, but the Bureau of Labor Statistics has numbers on self-employed writers and numbers on fully employed media-workers. If you look at that we vastly outnumber them. It suggests that while staff jobs are being shed, freelance jobs are growing.

JG: If we're not in the majority we will be shortly. Just like everything else. Pick any industry and you'll see a massive growth of independent contractors that are operating across the economic spectrum. I'm sure there are other workers across other industries that are having these conversations, too. Increasingly we're all going to be independent contractors, that's just the way things are right now. You can look at that as a bad thing but I look at it as a positive thing because if we all start talking to each other we can be the catalyst for better working conditions ●

“POPULISM” IS A FAKE LABEL



by Raegan Davis

Political science scholars have a term, “Populism,” a word that’s used in the field to describe both Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders, Brexit and Jeremy Corbyn, France’s National Front and Italy’s Five Star Movement. This concept stretches from Latin American decolonization movements to Hitlerian Germany — commentators use it constantly and it seems as though it can be used to describe just about anyone.

But, what does it actually mean?

In their article Rise of the Trumpenvolk, J. Eric Oliver and Wendy M. Rahn describe populism as a largely rhetorical structure or political “strategy” rather than an ideology itself. Populism is characterized by a simple, direct, emotional, and often indelicate “style” which focuses on the “people” as opposed to the “elites.” As a result, it has some kind of “restorative” goal.

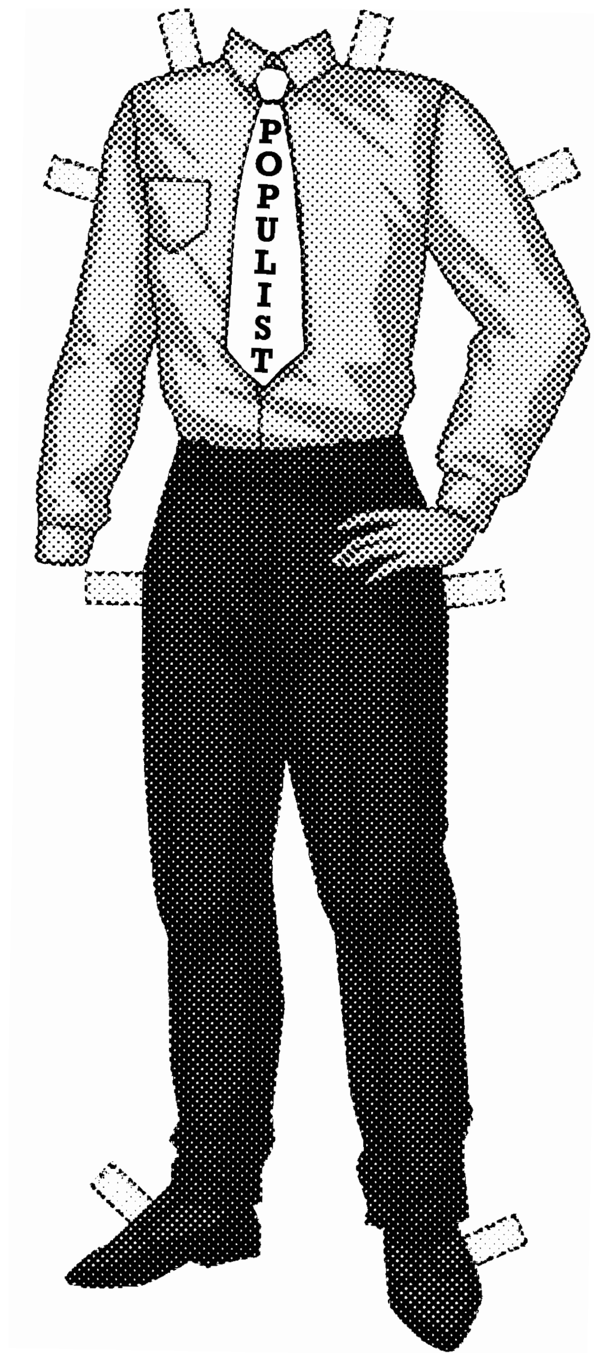
But what is a restorative goal? Who are the “people?” Who are the “elites?” The answer is, put simply, political scientists don’t know. In order to give a speaker the label of “populist,” these researchers simply need to hear the way a speaker posits themselves; the actual tangible political goals are irrelevant. Being dubbed a “populist” means that you, the politician, have spoken in a certain way about the people you wish to represent and pledged to do something about it. That’s it. That’s what a populist is.

Now, if you go and you try to do some research on populism, you will first find a veritable treasure trove of articles about the dangers populism poses to our government and to democracy as a whole. This concept, which political scientists cannot even agree to a definition of, is a label for any movement or candidate who believes the people are not well-represented by the government. The classification is described by Oliver and Rahn as any movement which attempts for the aforementioned “restorative goal” to replace existing corruption with a popular political order, has an “apprehensive worldview,” and posits claims to economic and social nationalism while rejecting experts in favor of the people’s will. It expressly has no ideology – so it can be conveniently applied to politicians and political movements of any ideology.

In order for a political movement to be labeled “populist,” it does not need to meet all of the criteria. Oliver and Rahn write that, in fact, the Sanders movement to which they compare the Trump movement in the United States is not “apprehensive” or nationalist and it does not reject experts.

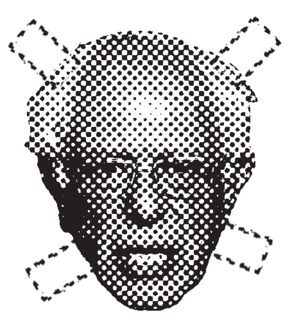
The semantic gymnastics which political scientists and pundits perform to insist that left-wing movements are just as populist as right-wing movements goes so far as to describe Latin American anticolonial activism as "nationalism" and thus akin to European white nationalist movements.

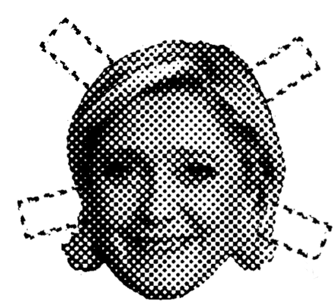
The most dangerous elements of populism, the rejection of facts and the emphasis on nationalism, are really just elements of fascism. However, by attributing these problems to mythical "populism" and then labeling leftists as populists, not only is the capitalist mainstream media capable of drawing a false equivalency between two radically different movements which oppose each other, but it's also able to smear leftists, who genuinely want to restore economic and political power to everyday people, and attribute characteristics to them which thier own research proves they do not have.



In truth, no politician has ever identified as a populist. Few political scientists can agree on a definition of the term and when they do, their definition is actually just "fascist rhetoric" defined so broadly that it can be falsely attributed to politicians on both ends of the political spectrum. It's a subtle jab, never questioned and therefore dangerous. There is nothing wrong with wanting political power in the hands of the people, so long as the people are defined as the working class and the elites are defined as the capitalist class. Centrist politicians and political scientists, in attempting to shame leftists as "populists" for their advocacy, inadvertently show their hand every time in this regard. William A. Galston in *The Populist Challenge to Liberal Democracy* explains that populism turns politics into a struggle of "us against them." Right-wing populism defines "us" as white or native-born citizens and "them" as immigrants or people of color. Left-wing populism defines "us" as the working class and "them" as the rich.

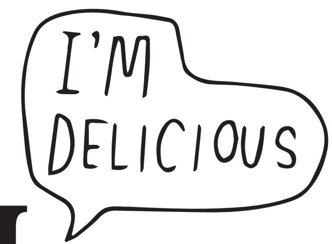
This definition of populism says criticizing the wealthy, who genuinely hold power and truly make the lives of others worse through their actions, is the same as calling for the ethnic cleansing of marginalized people. Historical materialist analysis is, therefore, always populist to them. Anyone who calls for an economic power shift becomes the same as Donald Trump. No wonder the most popular right-wing meme about Antifa is to call them "the real fascists."





Luckily for those of us who wish to end the false equivalency caused by deeming political movements "populist," there is a quick and easy solution to force the word out of any centrist's vocabulary. Next time you hear someone describe a leftist or left-wing movement as "populist," ask them to define populism for you. If even scholars of populism have trouble articulating what they mean by the term, it's unlikely that any centrist off the street would be able to either. If it turns out they can, the answer they give will undoubtedly include an inaccurate definition of nationalism or create exemptions to certain elements of the definition which conveniently "don't apply to all movements." The movements these elements don't apply to will be the leftist ones because the rhetoric centrists describe is characteristically right-wing. Point that out. Tell them there is no point in creating this characterization if its definition does not apply to all of the movements it tries to characterize. Then, try to explore with your new centrist friend why they want so desperately to be able to lump leftists and fascists together – the answer will tell you a lot about who they are and what they have to gain from doing so.

LITTLE BIG UNION



Burgerville Workers United is getting some company as another Portland, Oregon-area burger chain has formed a union with the IWW. This time it's Little Big Burger, a subsidiary of Chanticleer Holdings, LLC., a large conglomerate that--along with twenty Little Big Burger restaurants across Oregon, North Carolina, Texas, and Washington--also owns Hooters, Just Fresh, American Burger Co., and Burgers Grilled Right franchises.

The Little Big Union was born over a dispute about floor mats. In early 2017, a few workers were hanging out after their shift and got to talking about the lack of non-slip mats in the restaurant. It was a hazard and many of them had complained to management but, of course, management did nothing. So they decided to start a petition to have management purchase non-slip mats. It was an immediate success. From there, things just grew until the workers went public as an IWW-affiliated union in March.

Chanticleer Holdings is no stranger to worker resistance though: in 2016 they settled a $675,000 wrongful termination and wage theft suit and most recently hired the well-reputed union-busting law firm Bullard Law Group to fight against the growing spread of worker organization.

IW co-editor Alec Shurtz sat down to talk with Kayla Black, a Little Big Burger worker and LBU organizer, about her experience:

Alec: So how long have you been at Little Big Burger? What do you do there? It looks like a typical fast-casual work setup but it's hard to tell. Like are there separate jobs or do you pretty much all do everything (like cook, clean, run the register)?

Kayla: I've been with Little Big Burger for a year and two months now and everyone pretty much has the same job. We all cook, clean, and do everything needed to keep the store functioning.

It's one store that's gone public so far? Are you at that one?

I would say it's more accurate that the union as a whole has gone public, not one individual store. I work at our Division [Street] location, along with eight other workers and two managers.

So what's it like working there? And how did you get organized? Like what convinced you that you needed to participate in collective action?

It more or less started about two years ago at our 23rd [Street] location, when workers were hanging out after work at a bar and discussing how they needed non-slip mats but management had continuously ignored their asks. So they wrote a petition asking for non-slip mats, had everyone in the store sign it and they delivered it to their manager. Less than a week later they got their non-slip mats and as soon as workers found their power in collective action it was all downhill from there (lol). I came into LBB about a year after that happened and since then more and more workers had been meeting outside of work, forming what would be the LBU. I didn't know of any organizing going into the job but was very interested when a trusted fellow coworker approached me about joining the union about two to three months into working there.

For me, what had me so interested was that I had both already aligned with leftist politics, but also had

tried multiple times to speak with a manager about issues in the workplace (including needing non-slip mats) and received dead air each time. So I was just very eager to be able to stand with coworkers who felt the same and being able to feel legitimately supported

So did they approach you before you knew about the campaign or was that common knowledge when you started?

It was extremely sensitive information at that point in organizing. Our manager had just stepped out and it was only us two in the store when he [the coworker] approached me about it. Also, sorry, I failed to mention I was initially hired at the [NE Alberta Street] location, which is one of their most busy stores. It also had one of the highest turnover rates, plagued with extremely toxic managers, which is what led to me transferring to the Division location after working at Alberta for eight to nine months

Is that kind of toxic environment still going on there? And what about your store? I saw on the LBU website that one of the demands is "respectful and professional conduct from management." How is that going?

Since my transferring, the toxic manager hasd stepped down from management to be an associate and transferred to another location. However, her friend whom she had personally hired beforehand had then moved up from key[1] to the manager and now displays her own brand of toxic behavior. Luckily there's now three organizers at the Alberta store, versus when I was the only one there. So in short, yes, very little has changed when it comes to the environment at Alberta.

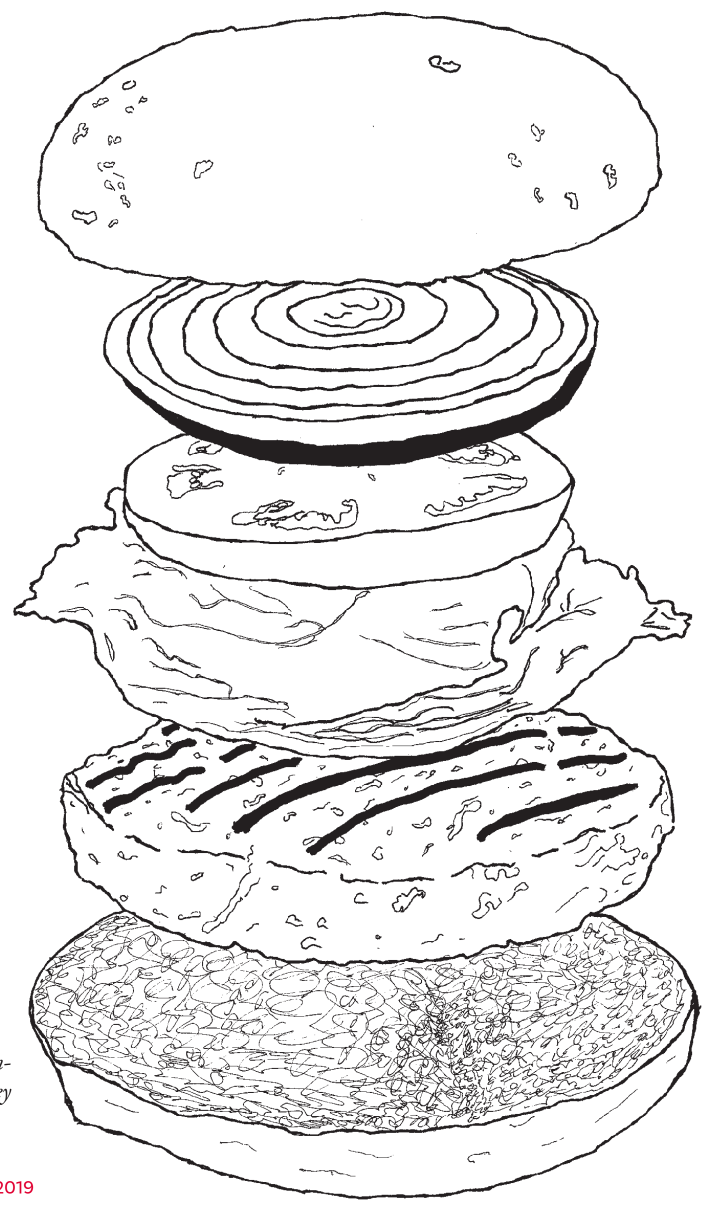
As for Division, it is a much more slow and relaxed location, and we have overall majority support for the union among our associates and keys, but management is still nasty just like almost everywhere else

A coworker, Zaria, was the only other trans woman at our location (Division) and she faced consistent harassment from managers until she was fired after only working here for barely a month, something that's pretty unheard of. It's not easy to get fired here but that really changes when they want it to.

So after you were approached about organizing, what happened next? I assume you went to some meetings and talked things over; how did it build into going public? Was there a specific plan or did it happen naturally?

After I was approached, I got in touch with other coworkers that were in the know and began going to weekly meetings. We would discuss and document the current states of each location we could, trying to get an organizer at each location to get the most accurate pulse of this awful business.

Like the little engine that could, [we] just kept on meeting weekly, working at each of our stores, working to slowly and carefully find workers who would support the cause, until eventually we felt we had a



[1] *A key is an associate that can carry out the same job as a manager, including: opening/closing, doing Sysco orders, and being the "supervisor" for a shift. However, they don't make the schedule like managers do, or participate in hiring/firing processes.*

comfortable enough presence to make ourselves known

I love that little engine analogy. Did you all go public over a specific grievance?

We went public by drafting and sending an announcement to our work chat to the entire company that said that the rumors that anyone may [have] heard of a union forming are 100% true, and that we will be going to launch off at a local park (near two of their most popular locations, 23rd and Pearl) and that everyone is invited and if they wanted any info to contact the union (and we provided our email/ phone number).

We had workers copy and post this draft. We had one after the other to show solidarity and keep management from trying to pick out "key organizers."

Then the day of, about an hour before, we email[ed] the managers from the union email, asking them to join us at their NW 23rd location so we may deliver and read our list of demands to them. We then got confirmation from someone working that one of our managers showed up shortly after.

That was when we had a nice sunny gathering at our local Couch Park and prepared volunteers we had reached out to prior (DSA, Jobs with Justice, etc.) with signs and LBU t-shirts. After a few guest speakers and union workers explaining why we're doing what we're doing, we went and marched through the streets to [the 23rd Street store], chanting and making our presence known. When we got to 23rd Street, we split onto the two sidewalks and made our way to the store, where we formed a moving picket line (like an infinite conga line of support) and chanted along for about an hour or so until we delivered our demands, marched another forty-five minutes longer and then returned back to the park to end our demonstration.

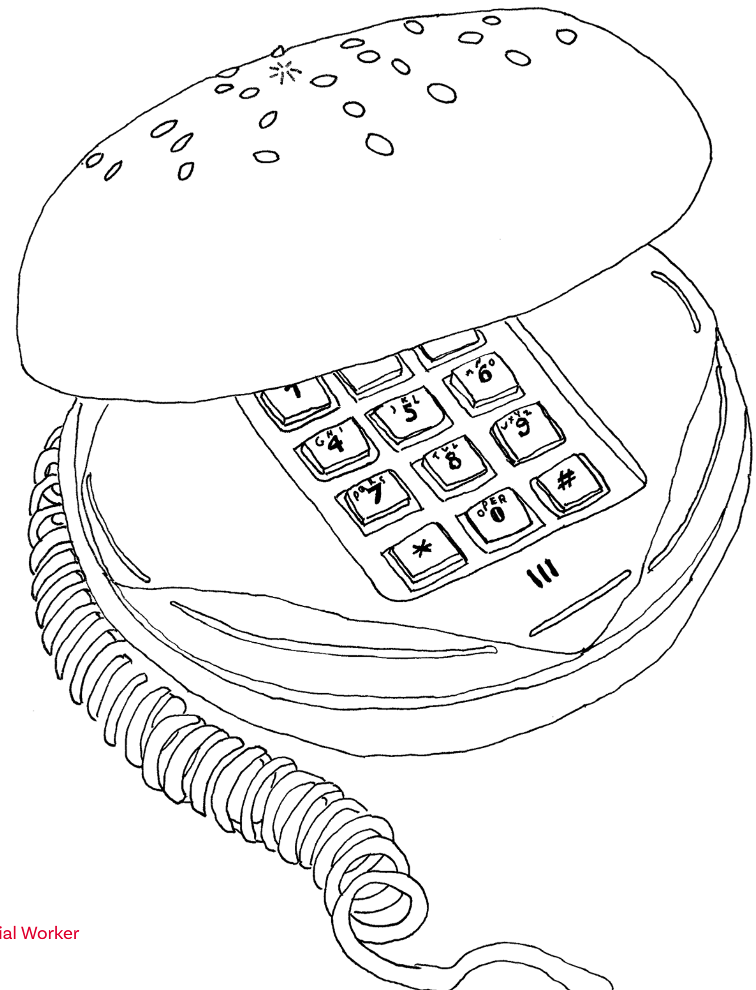
The general vibe was a mix of long-time grievance but focusing on the joy and community support for a wonderful new change for the company. Very celebratory. We wanted to be firm but positive, because this is a really positive thing. It has and will continue to make a very important change in workers' lives and I'm really happy about it

This union is the only reason I'm still working here, because it's something I actually care about. My coworkers are people I actually care about. I don't care about this job, and it certainly doesn't care about us.

So what's next for the LBU? I saw that some folks recently got fired from NW 23rd. I assume you'll continue working to get them rehired, how do you plan to go about that and are you considering filing for NLRB election?

We've been discussing how the firings have affected things and are currently planning a series of actions, including picketing like we had when another union worker was fired and we were looking to actually hire the 23rd worker as a full-time organizer to work with the LBU in the meantime until she's rehired. As for an election, I believe we were hoping to just file a card check and avoid having to deal with NLRB elections, so we could just prove our numbers and move on straight to bargaining.

And we're pretty confident in the 23rd worker getting



her job back, as she was fired in the middle of a currently ongoing “investigation” on the three workers who walked out, while the other two are still only on suspension. It was pretty blatantly illegal/retaliatory.

Yeah it sounds like it. Are you concerned at all by the union-busting lawyers they hired? What has the anti-union front looked like? Like what have management and scabby coworkers been doing?

Well after we put up our four-page FAQ about the union in each store, about a week later they had put up their four-page FAQ about the union, written of course by Bullard Law. Then a few weeks later they replaced their regular four pages for one huge master FAQ, with a few more paragraphs of extra nonsense. Some managers also try to take down union-related posters, take home union pamphlets/buttons, of course out of plain sight. They’ve also put up “we’re hiring” posters up [at] each store as a looming unspoken threat. There’s also the regular messages in our work chat from General Manager Adrian Oca spreading misinformation about the union and trying to warn us of fact and fiction in articles coming out about Little Big Burger and their union busting. They also have hired managers specifically to union bust, like at my store of Division. Some managers have even tried to coerce workers into joining the union as a spy for them (“Jokingly”🙄).

Wow, that’s some unfair labor practices right there.

They sure are! I can only imagine what the NLRB thinks is going on down here with the consistent flow of ULPs[2] we keep sending their way lmao.

So how’s the partnership with Burgerville Workers Union? Do you all meet up regularly, is there a liason, how does that work?

We’ve been in near-constant contact with the BVWU all along; they’ve been an invaluable resource in our organizing and we can’t appreciate them enough. When we went public plenty of BVWU workers marched and chanted alongside us. We’ve also been trying [to] further our bonds in the future by meeting up fairly regularly with BVWU to have larger conversations, but that currently hasn’t been where we need to focus most of our energy. But yea, we have a great relationship with the BVWU and were excited to continue to work and grow alongside them :-)

Last Question: what has been the highlight for you so far as part of LBU and what has been the greatest challenge or thing you learned from?

Favorite moment so far is getting two-week schedules for every store in the Portland metro area. That’s a huge win that wouldn’t have happened without pressure from the workers.

Biggest challenge has been the retaliatory firings on openly union workers. It’s been pretty upsetting but it only acts as fuel to the fire to keep on pushing and keep on fighting for our basic rights as workers. Also, I think the best thing I’ve learned from organizing is how to reach out and open up to my coworkers and form real friendships and bonds. My experiences at my other jobs were very isolated and it really felt like everyone was mostly to themselves, just on that daily grind. But hanging out with coworkers outside of work and working together to make our collective workspace a better place, it’s been really engaging and actually makes my job mean something to me.

[2] An Unfair Labor Practice complaint is a filing made with the National Labor Relations Board protesting employer malfeasance.

IWW Olympia Branch
Train Riding (sub)Committee
Wall Reportback

It's that time again fellow workers. Gonzo Wobbly reporter of doom is back from the brink with a fresh hot revolutionary story of love and war to give you, yes YOU, a momentary euphoric dose of infotainment. Because nothing says solidarity like burning my fucking eyes out trying to write this goddamn thing.

Editor's note: This reportback will not feature any sex. Our Gonzo Wobbly reporter has informed me that the warning "Don't try this at home," might not have been obvious in previous pornographic reportbacks. Sex is dangerous and should only be attempted by trained professionals. Fellow workers attempting to have sex should consider themselves warned. You will get hurt.



Let's start with some traveling. Cruising down the road crammed on top of four cylinders of conventional transportation, the committee and I hightailed it south, forgoing our locomotive namesake for an automobile. Because you see, fellow worker, we were invited to join the revolutionaries down at the border to help stand up against Trump's Wall, and we didn't want to waste any time with romantic narrative devices.

So we booked it from the endless snow of the white ethno-state of South Dakota to the mountain hideouts of workers in Denver to the great tortilla flatness of Amarillo, Texas to the galactic starry sky over Gallup, New Mexico, and from the whiskey-whiskered pirates of New Orleans to the interplanetary front lines of San Juan, Texas.

To the reality show itself, where the metal prick on Trump's own industrial death-cock fucks straight into your ear, where federal government UFOs abduct so-called "illegal aliens" at night. Where grinning gestapo goose-step in naked displays of gathering war. Welcome to the Wall, fellow worker.

You know, this is all like a sequel of The Black Hills Special Reportback series (Fear and Loathing in South Dakota). The Crazy Horse Collective and the committee at this point were one and the same. We came on behalf of both in the name of mutual aid.

We first arrived at the National Butterfly Center in San Juan Texas, southernmost tip of the state we aren't supposed to mess with.

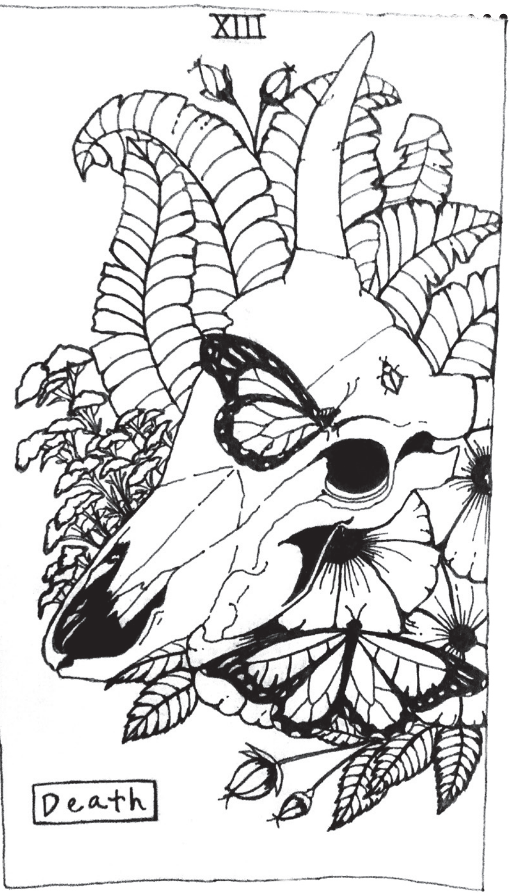
I spilled out the door into the parking lot, wretched creature that I am, while my companions exited with their individual grace, each of whose characters are too large for life and whose descriptions would defy the thin suspension of disbelief I can assert from you, fellow worker.

You see, the magical monarch butterfly has a breeding ground here that pulls in tourists from around the world. Every spring every inch of the environment is coated in these beautiful creatures as they make their mythical migration across the continent.

But of course, migration is super verboten to the ingrown toenail creatures known as fascists. And so not only are they erecting a pointless wall, they are destroying everything within three hundred yards in either direction of it. That means the butterfly habitat is in the process of being clear-cut.

I don't have to point out, but I will, that walls don't even stop human migration, since there's a thing called AIRPLANES. But they do stop other mammals' migrations, which sucks, because all the animals are going fucking extinct. And I love animals.

Wandering around the wreckage asking myself the perennial question "Where the hell is the revolution?" I observed tour-



ists there to get a Polaroid with the endling monarch butterfly. It was then the surreal feeling of being beyond the pale returned once again to smack my skull like a fucking double-sided dildo from hell.

Wob damnit, fellow worker, the stage is set with such quantities of post-ironic suicidal stupidity, how can these characters be so unfazed by the fact that the background has been obliterated? "Oh look dear a clearcut, will you take my picture with it?"

I'm not bitter, really, I promise. I love my job.

Enter stage left: A van pulled into the parking lot. Our committees recognized one another as having that vague rebel alliance aesthetic, which might as well be a neon sign in this late hour. We made our introductions and hashed out the common relation and soon we were on our way to the rebel base.

Yes it's true, this time we found the revolution in under a day!

Behold the invisible union, the circuit of renegades, out there: going from front line to front, rotating in and out of active duty. The post-Standing Rock diaspora. It is said "Those who make half a revolution dig their own graves." Standing Rock was half a revolution. We're still working on the other half.

Morale was high at camp and organization was tight. The food was delicious like you wouldn't believe.

I'd say we ate like kings but I'm done with monarchist metaphors.

As delicious as the food was the relief that comes only from being on the front lines. It's really a sanctuary of sanity in a mass extinction event, at least for yours truly.

Here's a hot take: self-sabotage occurs when you're not sabotaging the machinery that will end up killing you. Self-destructive behavior is what you do when you're not destroying cop cars.

While sitting around the campfire we heard and shared stories from the other revolutionary nodes in this protracted conflict. It was good to be back in the thick of things, fellow worker; when you're surrounded by defiant comrades, it's easy to have hope.

From the campfire I could look north and see the most important physical feature of this battlefield: a thing called "the levee." This was a raised road on an earthen embankment upon which the wall was to be



built. Our camp, which included a veterans cemetery, was within the 300-yard destruction zone mandated by the fascists.

Every night squadrons of storm troopers would zoom past us full speed on their four-wheelers with their lights off and their night vision goggles on. Every night, thermal vision cameras on helicopters would chop through the black sky overhead while the air in the distance broke apart to the sound of machine guns.

War is brewing on the border. Countries don't just close their borders and then open them again. They close them and then a war starts. Every. Time. While getting oriented for my first night watch I asked the woman in charge of bottom-lining volunteer schedules about the machine guns going off in the distance.

"Oh those? Yeah, that happens."

"Who are they?"

"What, you think we're the only ones out here?"

"...Yes?"

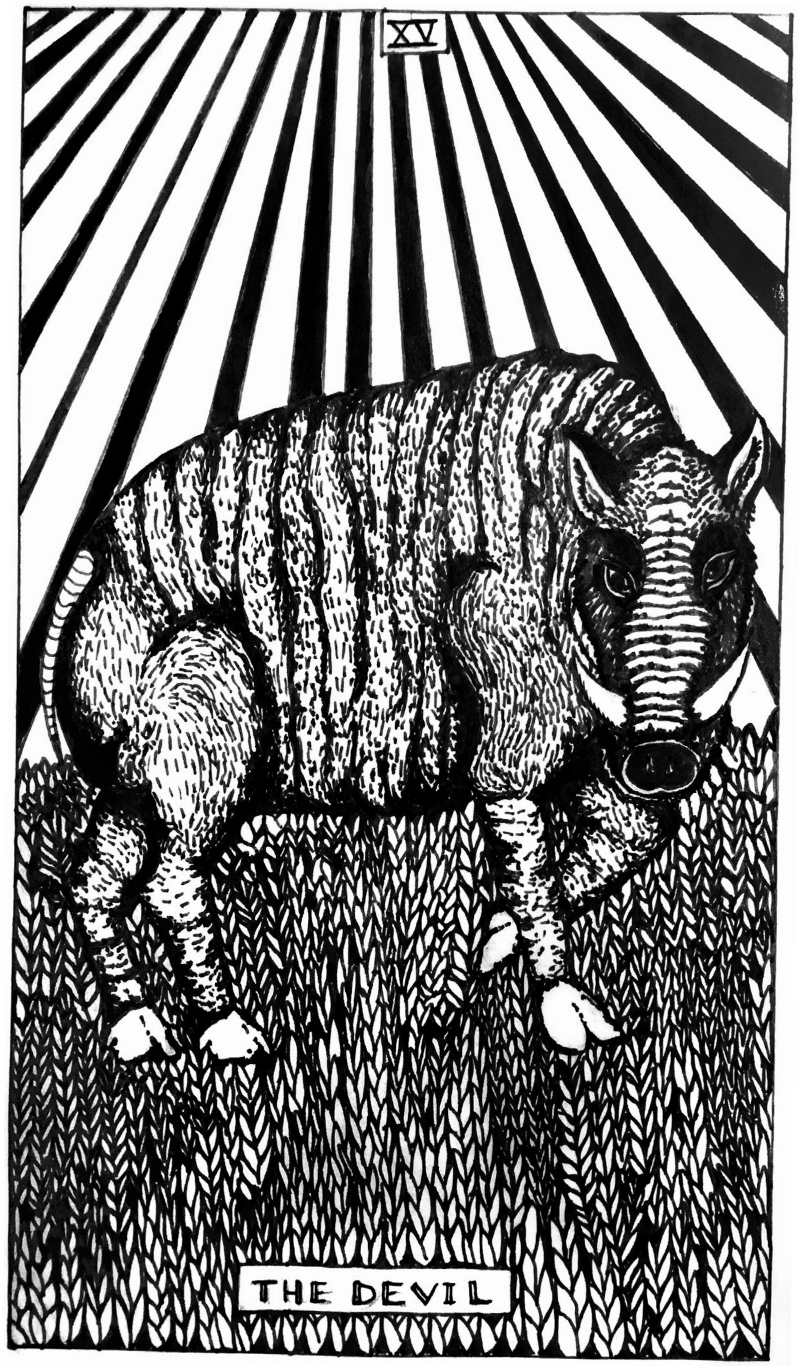
"No, there's other groups too, unaffiliated with us."

"Like who?"

"ANTIFA."

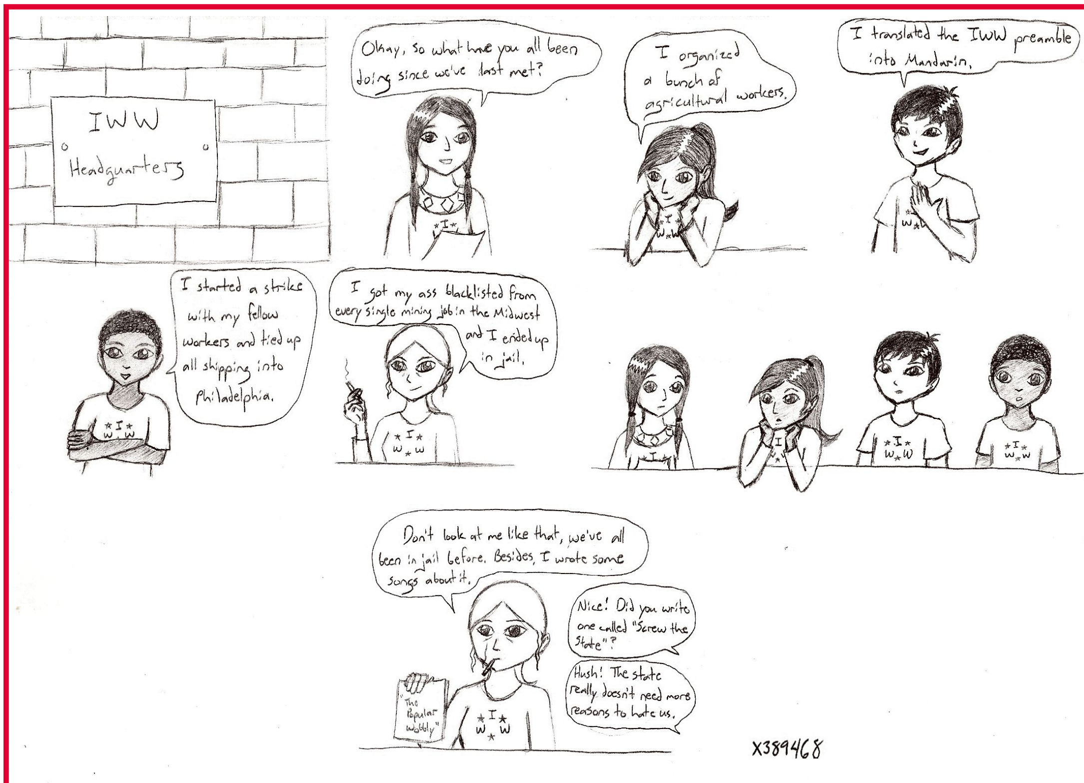
I can't make this stuff up.

Tune in next time for another reportback from the cancerous wasteland of the Wall, where Gonzo Wobbly swims in the Rio Grande, makes friends and enemies, and breaks out the power tools.



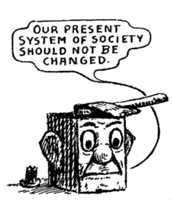
Carter T. Gunderson can be found on Twitter @GonzoWobbly. For more reports from the Olympia Train Riding Subcomittee, visit https://gonzowobbly.wixsite.com/reportback

COMICS


IWW Headquarters
Okay, so what have you all been doing since we've last met?
I organized a bunch of agricultural workers.
I translated the IWW preamble into Mandarin.
I started a strike with my fellow workers and tied up all shipping into Philadelphia.
I got my ass blacklisted from every single mining job in the Midwest and I ended up in jail.
Don't look at me like that, we've all been in jail before. Besides, I wrote some songs about it.
Nice! Did you write one called "Screw the State"?
Hush! The state really doesn't need more reasons to hate us.
"The Popular Wobbly"
X389468


Leftist Comics
"The Other Option"
Workers really should trust me more. I'm resented by the boss, so I must be good. Besides, it's not like they have other options.
AFL CIO
Heh, heh... nevermind them, they're not a real union. After all, they make you do all your organizing yourself! We have lots of professionals to make deals with the boss for you!
X389468


Leftist Comics
"Liberal Meets Syndi-Cat"
Who are you?
I'm the One Big Union.
So, you're like the AFL-CIO?
No, how dare you.
I'm confused. You said you were a union.
The One Big Union.
What's that?
A really big union for all workers.
Okay, that just sounds like you're the AFL-CIO but more ambitious.
No! I want to overthrow capitalism, not co-operate with it!
Hang on, you said you were a union, not the Communist Party!
. . .
Good lord, this is going to take awhile...
X389468


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Periodicals Postage
PAID
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Industrial Worker
PO Box 180195
Chicago, IL 60618
ISSN 0019-8870
ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED